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## Liquor Barn cuts off some state wineries

### They back allowing grocery wine sales

BY ALEX DAVIS • ALEXDAVIS@COURIER-JOURNAL.COM • OCTOBER 1, 2008

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One of Kentucky's largest liquor retailers is no longer buying products from some of the state's wineries, because they support a campaign to allow wine sales in grocery stores.

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Liquor Barn, which has three stores each in Lexington and Louisville, stopped making purchases earlier this month from Springhill Winery and Elk Creek Vineyards, among others.

"I can't be foolish enough to give them money to use against Liquor Barn," Roger Leasor, the retailer's president, said yesterday.

Kentucky is one of 16 states that don't allow wine to be sold in food stores. A bill supported by grocers earlier this year would have opened up such sales in stores with at least 10,000 square feet of space, but the legislation died in a House committee.

Backers of the campaign aren't going away, however, and Luke Schmidt, a consultant for the Food with Wine Coalition, said another bill is in the works. Sales would be limited to grocery stores in counties that allow liquor sales, he said, and convenience stores wouldn't be included.

Leasor and other package retailers oppose the change on the grounds that it would hurt their sales. Dan Meyer, of the Wine and Spirits Wholesalers of Kentucky, said his group also continues to oppose the campaign, saying it could expose more children to alcohol.

Liquor Barn still buys products from more than a dozen Kentucky wineries, but Leasor said he stopped buying from four or five recently due to their active support for the Food with Wine Coalition. Major grocery chains including Kroger Co. support the coalition.

At Springhill Winery in Nelson County, owner Eddie O'Daniel said Liquor Barn was his largest account, selling 1,000 cases a year. O'Daniel said an executive at Liquor Barn promised to restock his bottles if he dropped his support for the campaign.

"I was shocked that they would just cut it off," said O'Daniel, who also is president of the Kentucky Wineries Association. "They told me they were going to do this to everyone in our winery association, and we have 12 wineries that represent almost 80 percent of the wine made in Kentucky."

Elk Creek Vineyards in Owen County is the state's largest winery, producing 43,000 gallons last year. Owner Curtis Sigretto said Liquor Barn's decision was disappointing, especially considering Leasor's membership on the Kentucky Grape and Wine Council, which promotes the wine industry.



2006 Courier-Journal file photo The Liquor Barn on Fern Valley Road, above, and others in the chain still sell products from more than a dozen Kentucky wineries. But the retailer won't support those that push for wine sales in grocery stores.

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The council gets support from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. Bill Clary, an agency spokesman, said the state doesn't have a position on the wine legislation, and it doesn't monitor the business activities of the grape council's members.

Additional details about the grocery legislation are still being decided, Schmidt said. The coalition hopes a bill can be introduced in the General Assembly early next year, he said.

Reporter Alex Davis can be reached at (502) 582-4644.

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